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THE
PERSIAN LUSTRE VASE
IN THE IMPERIAL HERMITAGE
AT
ST PETERSBURG

THE
PERSIAN LUSTRE VASE

IN THE IMPERIAL HERMITAGE

AT

ST PETERSBURG

AND SOME FRAGMENTS OF LUSTRE VASES

FOUND NEAR CAIRO AT FOSTÂT

BY

F. R. MARTIN

STOCKHOLM

SOLD BY G. CHELIUS OF STOCKHOLM AND BY
K. W. HIERSEMANN OF LEIPZIG

1899

Printed in 200 copies
of which 100 are for sale.

Heliotypes by Ch. Westphal in Stockholm.

Printed by
P. Palmquists Aktiebolag, Stockholm
1899.



Fig. 1. Wall-tile representing King Bahram V. Godman collection.

Henry Wallis is a name that must always be quoted by those occupied with the ceramic art of the Middle Ages of the Orient, that no one knows better than he. To him the following lines ought to be dedicated, if they were worth his accepting. As he knows and has spoken about all the remarkable, ancient Oriental ceramic objects in the collections of Western Europe, the author of these short lines may be allowed to say a few words about some objects now preserved in the collections of Northern Europe, that Wallis has perhaps not seen or at least not published.

The Museum of Industrial Art in St. Petersburg, that bears Baron Stieglitz's name, possesses perhaps the largest collection of Persian lustre faience, from the 16th and the beginning of the 17th Century, that is to be found on the Continent; but as they are not of so great an interest as the older products, I will pass directly to the most remarkable piece of the kind that exists.

The Imperial Hermitage at St. Petersburg has obtained possession of it with the Basilewsky Collection, purchased by the late Emperor Alexander III. It is not only the most remarkable but also the largest piece of lustre faience known up to date, except the Alhambra vases, of which the Hermitage owns the fine specimen which formerly belonged to Fortuny. As far as I know it has not been reproduced

before, and I take the liberty of presenting to the reader the photograph given to me some years ago, by my old friend, W. v. Bock, the director of the Museum, whose sudden death so many now deplore, not only in Russia but in all Europe.

There can be no doubt about the time and the country to which that splendid specimen belongs. It is from the 13th century and is made in Persia. Mr. Kondakow, the former director, in his Guide through the medieval and renaissance parts of the Imperial Hermitage, calls the vase Arobo-Sicilian and states that it was made in Galata Girone. It is to be hoped that the time will soon be past, when Persian faience is called Sicilo-Arabian, and Persian carpets, Hispano-Moorish, the usual name of the splendid woollen carpets with large flowers on red or blue ground, made in Persia during the beginning and the middle of the 17th century.

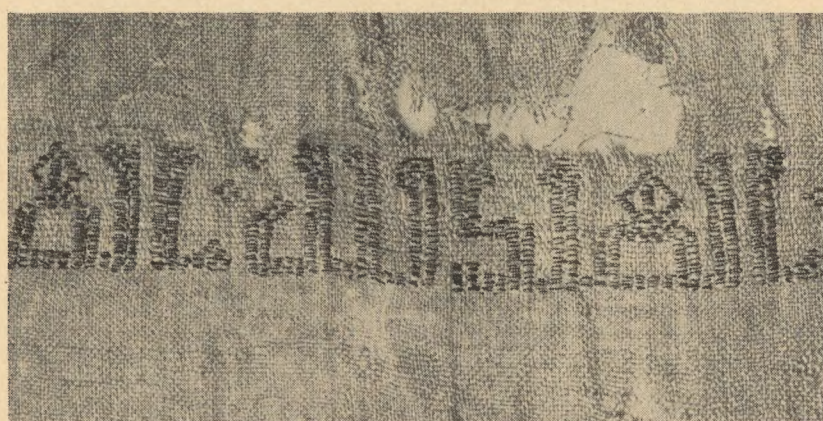


Fig. 1. Linen stuff with Cufic inscription: Power belongs to God.
1/2 Collection of the author.

One only needs to look at the figures on the vase to see that they belong to the same period and country as the star-formed tiles and vases, published by Wallis. Moreover the ground with its small scrolls is so truly Persian, and always repeated in the faiences of the 13th century. The low relief is also to be found in the large tiles with bold Neskhy letters in relief, generally painted in blue, on a ground of scrolls.

Plate XXVI, in Wallis' *Persian ceramic art. The thirteenth century lustred wall-tiles* represents a wall-tile with King Bahram V on the back of a camel, of the same kind as the vase in St. Petersburg. This remarkable wall-tile is stated to have come from an old castle in Mazanderan. Wallis says: »This tile is the only example of its kind known to the writer. It is scarcely probable, however, that it stood alone and it may have formed one of a series of historical subjects treated in the similar manner».

More difficulties arise to determine the time and place when and where the fragments reproduced in the Plates II—V were made. They were all found by the

excavations made by the author during the winter of 1896 in the rubbish-mounds at Fostât, near Cairo, whence he brought home a collection of several thousand fragments, of which only about 100 small pieces were with lustre the best of which are reproduced here. Every one who has been in Cairo has seen these mighty mounds on the way to the tombs of the Caliphs. They have been formed partly from the ruins of Fostât, which was destroyed in the year 1186 and partly from the refuse of the bazar of Cairo, and from pottery piles, situated in the vicinity as they are still to-day. Quantities of fragments have been found there. The question: Were they all made there? may be answered without hesitation, No. As *Egyptian* make I consider all the brown- or green-glazed earthenware, most of which bears the arms of Mameluck Princes, and inscriptions such, as »Glory to our Master, the Sultan»



Fig. 3. Linen stuff with Cufic inscription in red. $\frac{2}{3}$ Collection of the author.

and »Of what was made for his Excellency» etc. and other similar inscriptions so often found on metal- and glass-objects from that time. Many of these fragments still bear the »cockspurs» or clay tripods upon which they were placed during the firing. Most of these seem to belong to the 14th and 15th century. To that kind of earthenware I hope to come back soon. On the spot copies were also made of the fine Persian blue and white faiences of which beautiful fragments, as well of the original as of the copies, have been found. Specially this fayence often bears on the bottom the artist's signature i. e. »made by El-Misry (the Cairene)», »made by the Master», »made by Esh-Scha'my (the Syrian)», »made by the son of Esh-Scha'my» or such names as Gheyby and Ghazzâl¹⁾. More rarely appear fragments of pottery from *Syria*, *Asia Minor*²⁾, *Italy*, *Spain*, and *China*. From the last country is found specially the celadon, so looked for by Sultan Ghouri, 1501—1516, still to-day after him called Ghouri. The celadon has also been copied by the potters of Cairo.

¹⁾ Herz Bey. Catalogne of the National Museum of Arab Art. pag. 65.

²⁾ the so-called Rodhos faience. I dare say that they ought to be called with the name of Sultan Soliman the Magnificent during whose reign they reached their highest development.

The most difficult to classify are the lustre faïences. Leaving aside the *Spanish*, which is easy to discern from the others, I would regard as *Persian*:

The fragments with dark-blue glaze and yellow or greenish lustre,

Those with turkis-blue or turkis-green glaze with lustre of different colours.

As *Egyptian* make I would classify:

Those with milk-white glaze with red or golden lustre, and

Those with gray or brownish glaze, with brownish lustre.

As truly *Egyptian* make I consider all the fragments with Cufic inscription which I am inclined to put as far back in time as to the 10th and 12th century, thus before the destruction of Fostât by fire in 1168. The lustred pottery with Cufic inscriptions seems to me to be the oldest of all. The form of the Cufic letters goes as far back as the 9th or 10th century, the time of the Cufic Korans. From that time we have still a few



Fig. 4. Interior decorations of the cup. Diam. 9 cm.
Collection of the author.

vases of crystal preserved in Venice, Florence, Nürnberg, Paris, and London, which letters have the same character. Some fragments of stuff have also been preserved to our day. Two specimens in my collection are seen in figs. 2 and 3. Naris-i-Khusrau's everywhere quoted statement, that »at Misr (i. e. Fostât) they make earthenware of all kinds, so fine and diaphanous that one can see one's hands through it. They make bowls, cups, plates and other vessels; decorate them with colours resembling (the iridescent stuff called) Bukalamun, so that the shades change according to the position in which the vessel is held» is not yet verified. However, several fragments in my collection prove the existence of very thin such faïence and I have some pieces nearly approaching transparency.

The description of the plates gives information about the different kinds of lustre, and there we find the whole scale of differing colours.

The fragments have belonged to large, cylindrical vases, large pear-shaped vases, bowls, plates, cups of different size, from very small to rather considerable ones, as well as covers of cups. That many of the faience plates were hung on the walls, when not used, is proved from holes, bored in the circles on the back. The circle and its centre present rather careless work and the clay is generally not of the finest kind. Unbroken vessels from Fostât are the greatest rarity, as Wallis has already stated. During my discoveries in the winter of 1896 I happened to find a small cup, unfortunately somewhat damaged in the rims. It is made of a brown clay with thin transparent glaze, decorated with brownish, brilliant lustre. The figures 4 and 5 show its ornamentation.

I think Henry Wallis is perfectly right in saying: »There can be little doubt, indeed, that the illuminated MSS were the chief disseminators of motives of ornamentation», and I think that the potters have tried to copy on cups and plates the brilliant golden lustres of the splendid mosque Korans.

A systematic exploration of the rubbish-mounds at Fostât would certainly give an answer to many important questions relative to the ceramic art of the medieval Orient. Perhaps we should then learn, that the Persians had got the art of making lustre faience from Egypt. May be that the potters, after the destruction of Fostât, were dispersed to Persia and Spain. Until such an exploration be realized we must content ourselves with the contributions derived from the study of the fragments accidentally found. With great interest researchers will look for every new contribution of Wallis, and for the work that Dr. Fouquet in Cairo intends to publish about his enormous collection of fragments from Fostât, the first which was made and still the greatest.



Fig. 5. Outside decoration of the cup. H. 5 cm.

Plate I.

LARGE LUSTRED VASE.

The body, is decorated with four bands separated from each other by a string in relief.

The band nearest the bottom is decorated with pigeons. The next with dogs hunting a deer. The third with men walking and cavaliers, aureolated, with caps on their heads, dressed in tunica and boots; over their shoulders they bear a bowed stick. On the fourth band dogs, deer, and panthers. Round the neck a band with aureolated men sitting on the earth, playing harps.

All these are executed in low relief.

The space between the figures are all filled up with plants in low relief. All painted with yellow brown lustre on white gray glazed. H. 79 cm.

In the Basilewsky Collection in the Imperial Hermitage at St. Petersburg.

PL. I.



LUSTRED VASE.
IMPERIAL HERMITAGE
AT
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H. 79 cm.

about 30 cm high

Plate II.

These fragments were all discovered by the author in the Cairo mounds at Fostât during the winter of 1896.

1. Bottom of a bowl, a bird in faint yellow lustre on white glaze.
Diam. 8 cm.
2. Bottom of a bowl, a bird in faint brown lustre on grayish glaze.
Diam. 14 cm.
3. Bottom of a bowl, a bird in brilliant yellow lustre on milk-white glaze.
Diam. 7 cm.
4. Bottom of a bowl, a bird in yellow-brown lustre on grayish glaze.
Diam. 11 cm.
5. Bottom of a bowl, a heraldic eagle in brilliant yellow lustre, on turkis-blue glaze.
Diam. 12 cm.
6. Bottom of a small bowl, a bird in brown lustre on white glaze.
Diam. 7 cm.
7. Bowl, a bird in very faint lustre on grayish glaze. Diam. 15 cm.
8. Portion of a cover of a cup. Two birds in green brilliant lustre on turkis-blue glaze.
Diam. 14 cm.
9. Bottom of a small bowl, a fish in brilliant yellow lustre on milk-white glaze.
Diam. 5.5 cm.
10. Portion from the board of a big bowl, a dog reserved in milk-white glaze on brilliant-yellow lustred ground. Diam. 8 cm.
11. Bottom of a bowl. Two fishes in faint yellow lustre on grayish glaze.
Diam. 9 cm.



LUSTRED FRAGMENTS

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FOSTÂT.

Plate III.

These fragments were all discovered by the author in the Cairo mounds at Fostât during the winter of 1896.

1. Bottom of a bowl; dark yellow brilliant lustre on white glaze. Diam. 10 cm.
2. Bottom of a bowl; a star in yellow brilliant lustre, reflecting violet, on tin glaze. Diam. 11 cm.
3. Bottom of a bowl; a star in red brilliant lustre on tin glaze. Diam. 16 cm.
4. Bottom of a big bowl, brilliant red lustre on turkis-green glaze.
5. Bottom of a bowl, greenish faint lustre on grayish glaze. Diam. 8 cm.
6. Bottom of a small bowl; brown lustre on turkis-blue glaze. Diam. 5 cm.
7. Bottom of a bowl, brown brilliant lustre on grayish glaze. Diam. 8 cm.
8. Bottom of a plate; brilliant golden lustre on milk-white glaze. Diam. 12 cm.
9. Bottom of a plate; portion of a woman's dress in brown, brilliant lustre, on grayish glaze. Diam. 14 cm.
10. Portion of a small cup, greenish lustre on white glaze. Diam. 7 cm.

PL. III.



LUSTRED FRAGMENTS

FOUND AT
FOSTÂT.

Plate IV.

These fragments were all discovered by the author in the Cairo mounds at Fostât in the winter of 1896.

1. Fragment from the neck of a vase in the same form as published by Wallis¹⁾. Grayish glaze white with yellow lustre, reflecting blue. The vase has evidently been about 40 cm. high.

2. Fragment from the neck of a vase, of the same form; grayish glaze with dark yellow lustre, reflecting in violet. The vase has plainly been about 35 cm. high.

3. Fragment from the board of a bowl, yellow lustre, reflecting red on white glaze. The bowl must have been about 33 cm.

4. Fragment of a bowl; milk-white glaze with golden lustre reflecting light red. The bowl has evidently been about 18 cm. in diam.

5. Fragment from the board of a bowl; yellow-green lustre on grayish glaze reflecting green.

6. Fragment of a bowl; turkis-green glaze, yellow-green lustre, reflecting greenish. The bowl must have been about 28 cm. in diam.

7. Portion of a bowl, grayish ground, greenish lustre, reflecting different colours. Diam. 10 cm.

8. Fragment of a bowl; milk-white glaze with golden lustre, reflecting different colours. The bowl must have been about 22 cm. in diam.

9. Fragment of a bowl, turkis-blue glaze with yellow-green lustre, reflecting red. Diam. 8 cm.

10. Fragment of a large bowl, dark turkis-green glaze; red lustre reflecting red. Diam. 12 cm.

¹⁾ Notes on some examples of early Persian pottery N:o 2. Figs. 4 and 5.

PL. IV.



LUSTRED FRAGMENTS

FOUND AT
FOSTÂT.

Plate V.

These fragments were all discovered by the author in the Cairo mounds at Fostât during the winter of 1896.

1. Portion of a bowl with Cufic inscription in dark red lustre. Thick tin glaze. on the reverse a Cufic inscription. Diam. 14 cm.
2. Fragment from the board of a bowl; Cufic inscription, brilliant yellow lustre on white glaze. Diam. 6 cm.
3. Two fragments of a bowl with reversed medallions with Cufic inscription on green-brown lustre, surrounded with red-brown. Thick white glaze. Diam. 12 cm.
4. Two fragments from the flat board of a plate with Cufic inscription in green-yellow lustre. Thick white glaze. Diam. 9 cm.
5. Portion of a bowl with Cufic inscription, reserved in gray-white on yellow-red brilliant lustre. Diam. 13 cm.
6. Fragment from the board of a plate which has been about 18 cm. in diameter. Cufic inscription in white, reserved on brilliant red ground. Thick white glaze. Diam. 9 cm.
7. Portion of a bowl with Cufic inscription in rather brilliant yellow lustre, on white glaze. Diam. 13 cm.

PL. V.



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Plate V.

These fragments were all discovered by the author in the Cairo mounds at Fostât during the winter of 1896.

1. Portion of a bowl with Cufic inscription in dark red lustre. Thick tin glaze. on the reverse a Cufic inscription. Diam. 14 cm.
2. Fragment from the board of a bowl; Cufic inscription, brilliant yellow lustre on white glaze. Diam. 6 cm.
3. Two fragments of a bowl with reversed medallions with Cufic inscription on green-brown lustre, surrounded with red-brown. Thick white glaze. Diam. 12 cm.
4. Two fragments from the flat board of a plate with Cufic inscription in green-yellow lustre. Thick white glaze. Diam. 9 cm.
5. Portion of a bowl with Cufic inscription, reserved in gray-white on yellow-red brilliant lustre. Diam. 13 cm.
6. Fragment from the board of a plate which has been about 10 cm. in diameter. Cufic inscription in white, reserved on brilliant red ground. Thick white glaze. Diam. 9 cm.
7. Portion of a bowl with Cufic inscription in rather brilliant yellow lustre on white glaze. Diam. 11 cm.

PL. V.



LUSTRED FRAGMENT

FOUND AT

FOSTÂT.

